The Editor

GAURI DESHPANDE

Though of course I had heard of Mr Gorwala from my parents, and had seen the copies of the little rag arriving in the post every week, I had but the vaguest of ideas about either before 1964. Some time in that momentous year I wrote two poems. Such a thing had not happened to any one in the family before. No one knew what to do with the scraps of paper. During the discussion of their future, I happened to see *Opinion* lying on my father's desk and on an impulse sent the two first products of my imagination off to the yet unknown editor. Picture my astonishment when, not only were the poems published, but were actually paid for. Such unheard of generosity encouraged me to further efforts of poetic adventure, convinced of the faultless good taste of the man who had the discerning eye to recognize genius at a glance. Alas, I have had many opportunities in the past to cast doubts upon Mr Gorwala's good taste, when a number of my favourite poems failed to meet its approval. But with his acceptance of my first two poems, I am proud to say, *Opinion* made its invaluable entry upon the scene of Indian writing in English. What Mr G (as we came to call him later when we were granted the privilege of his friendship) has done to encourage and promote Indian writing in English, is perhaps from his point of view one of the most minor and least memorable of services that he has rendered to the people of the country in a long career of selfless toil. But from the point of view of us, the poets and writers that he, no doubt whimsically and with a great deal of secret amusement, published in the monthly number of *Opinion* month after month, this service was nothing short of heroic. The money he paid per poem was handsome by any standards, and I am sure, to many of us, like myself, it made the difference between going without or not. Many a reference book while I was reading for my master's owes its journey from the book-

shop to my home to the cheque which said 'With the thanks and compliments of the Editor, *Opinion*'. And apart from the money, he provided to the frustrated writer in English, and especially the poet, one of the very few avenues of not only publication but recognition. It would be difficult today to find any recognized Indian poet in English with a book or two to his or her name, who had not been published by *Opinion*, early in his or her career. The credits at the beginning of their books invariably list *Opinion* (along with the ubiquitous *Quest*). Though Mr G himself may not consider it a matter of great importance, he has the unwavering affection and gratitude of many of the working poets of my generation, and the index to the back numbers of *Opinion* is likely to read like a who's who of Indian poetry in English.

Having had the good fortune to have worked briefly in a large newspaper office, I have come to appreciate the limited virtues of *Opinion* even more. In *Opinion*, talent (no doubt as its very opinionated Editor defined it) mattered, and not connexion. In the big papers, if you were in, you were in, if not, you had better set about cultivating some sub or the other. With the volume of contributions that they have to handle, it is perhaps not very surprising that they tend to stick to the tried and tested, but it must also be remembered that Mr Gorwala looks at, selects, subs, proofreads and sometimes corresponds about each contribution all by himself. When at a later date I insisted upon trying to lighten at least his proofreading burden, I found out that he used to glance once through the proof I had read and kept for the printer's boy. It was impossible to convince him that any other human being could be as conscientious or as painstaking as himself. And since he generally found a couple of misprints that had missed my eagle eye, I soon gave up trying. It is easy to assume that talent is what eventually matters in the literary world after all. But unless you are extraordinarily naïve, you will lose such assumptions fast enough. It was infinitely reassuring to find that in the 'offices' of *Opinion*, only talent mattered. If the Editor returned your ms. it was certainly not because he had not had time to read it, or he had not heard of you, or that he did not like the colour of the stationery you used. He returned it only because he did not think it up to his literary standards.

And his literary standards, though I have sometimes found them inscrutable, were not totally mysterious. Some of us may find them a bit old-fashioned, but a neat conceit, a genuinely felt emotion, a feel for the texture of the language, and especially a wry and ironic life-view always appealed to him. The articles published in *Opinion* under the general heading of social sciences were subject to more rigorous ideological scrutiny. They could get by with a bit of shoddy grammar which he would mutteringly correct, provided they said something with which he was in general agreement. The poems he did not assess for their content. He would remark a little sadly that people today seemed to blame their parents rather much (this was after accepting a poem of Mr Katrak's) or that they used too many esoteric words or that it is easy to love one's country when one is out of it (this to me once, very wryly), but what he thought the poem was about would have little to do with whether he liked it or not. Another curious trait was, that in this one field he seemed able to dissociate the writer from his work. I remember, once we all protested vigorously to him after he had published what was obviously a sly personal attack on a friend. He, not knowing either of the personalities involved, had chucklingly printed it. Not willing to admit a lapse in good taste, and yet nettled by our arguments, he still held on, complaining that 'It was a jolly *good* poem nonetheless!' I must admit that he was perfectly right, and that we, who pompously claimed that literature be judged on its literary merits alone, had no right to complain when he followed in this matter, as in every other, the law as he interpreted it. He would have hesitated to have dinner with a writer who was not a 'gentleman' but he would not mind publishing his poem, if it was a good poem. He would not have been able to make this distinction in the case of a sociologist, or a political scientist or an economist. There was no sense in arguing with him in this matter. An economist had to be an upright and honest man, a poet may be a rascal, provided he was a good poet. Literature was to be judged by literary standards and 'humanities' were to be judged by moral standards, and that was that. Otherwise a man as sexually conservative as him would certainly not have published many of my own poems, dismissing the lot perhaps as the ravings of an immoral imagination. He was, as he made it

perfectly clear when I came to know him well, not accepting my way of life, only the literary product of it!

Another peculiarity of his editorial policy as regards literature was that, true to his generation and vocation, he tended to regard literature as a subsidiary byproduct of the human imagination. If pushed to it, he would admit that the great literary geniuses of any language that he knew, and he knew quite a few, had often given him solace, consolation, even invaluable advice; but in truth he seemed to regard most belles lettres as a means of amusement; a means of saying something evident in a complicated, intriguing, or pretty way. His heart was in the social sciences and the literary part of his beloved *Opinion* was something he put in with a wink as it were. The ridiculous controversy some years ago as to whether *Opinion* should publish any belles lettres, especially poetry, at all, which he gleefully printed in his letters columns is a proof of the whole tongue-in-cheek attitude with which he publishes our poems in *Opinion*. I still remember with what amazement I witnessed his sly amusement at my fury when I protested against his encouraging that particular correspondence to drag on. It was then that I realized that he would not regard me very seriously until I undertook to do something 'solid' as he put it. As far as I was concerned, my poetry was plenty serious for me, but I found out that he was waiting for me to do something substantial in one of the fields he regarded worthy of serious human consideration. I must admit that to date I have failed him miserably. It was mostly this puckish attitude of his to literature that made the literary section of *Opinion* so varied and unexpected. It was not surprising to find an impassioned poem by Kamala Das jostling an amusing lament about the amount of noise that the Ganapati festival generated in Bombay. And if you asked him directly, he was as likely to rate the latter more 'worthy'; on account of its 'serious social' content, probably. However, I managed to discover this bias only after long and diligent investigation over the last few years. His scrupulous care in going through the poetic contributions, in proofreading them, in remuneration, was completely impartial. What the Editor of *Opinion* did for Indian poetry in English in his own whimsical and very individualistic way, was as valuable as anything an editor of a large-circulation weekly or monthly might

have done. I have found readers of *Opinion* scattered in curious corners of the world and to my knowledge, neither I, nor, to take only one other name, Kersey Katrak, have published much poetry anywhere outside of *Opinion,* and yet both our names are invariably mentioned in any survey of Indian poetry in English. This is not to boast of our achievements, small as they are, but to point to the large number of people a small-circulation, ideologically unfashionable, politically unpopular magazine like *Opinion* reaches, and that too, without any promotional effort on the part of its Editor. It may be, as he once put it when he was in a mood to flatter his contributors, the sheer good quality of the writing that appeals to the readers. I would like to go a little further and, not wanting to flatter any of us at all, say, that it is the stamp of the strong personality of the Editor that is the main appeal of *Opinion.* Each editor no doubt creates his magazine in his own image and the popularity or otherwise of that magazine depends upon whether that projected image catches on with the reading public or not. Many a successful editor has found out to his cost that his sales-curve inexorably plunged, once his novelty or curiosity or provocation value was finished. The really remarkable thing about the readership of *Opinion* is its Editor's ability to hold on to his readers. They all came to him because they respected his opinions, his tastes and his policies, whether they agreed with them or not. They stayed on because they made friends with his personality. The variation in the number of subscribers of *Opinion* has been negligible till very recently. Mr G is not a modest man by any standards, and yet he does genuinely feel that his poetic contributors have had some share in the making of his *Opinion.* In this I am afraid he flatters us; for the truth of the matter is, his *Opinion* has certainly had a share in the making of a large number of us. Of course, normally he is the last man to flatter anyone. In fact he has a marvellous way of puncturing one's pretensions with a well-aimed phrase or two. I remember one extremely memorable occasion which settled *my* hash for ever. He had invited a few of us to lunch. Taking us in to lunch, he had me on one arm and another friend, a very pretty woman, on the other. We were both dressed to the nines and fancying ourselves no end. In the anteroom he bowed to an aristocratic-looking lady, very chic, but without

doubt past her prime. Wanting to tease him into flattering us, we said, 'What must all your old flames be saying, Mr G, to see you flanked by pretty young ladies?' Promptly, he said, 'Oh, what a fall there was, my countrymen!'

Though he often said that so and so (generally this was with reference to K. N. Daruwalla) had written a jolly good poem, one did not really know how to take this faint praise. I always suspected an appendix to it: 'If poem-writing is what he has chosen to do, then it is just as well that he is jolly good at it; but of course it is even better that he is jolly good at being a policeman as well.' I often thought that he appreciated my cooking more than he did my poems, and Kersey Katrak once explained it by saying that being a good cook is more difficult than being a good poet.

In view of this attitude of the Editor to literary writing it is more than surprising, now that I come to consider it in the light of events, that he should have launched the *Opinion Literary Quarterly.* Perhaps it can be explained by saying that he was increasingly frustrated at how little of its real objective *Opinion* had achieved. (He makes this clear enough in the Editorial he wrote for the commencement number of *Opinion*'s fifteenth volume.) In the light of that (what he considered) failure, his modest success in helping Indian writers who were writing in English against all odds and often against official hostility (for English was the colonial language, the language we had been saddled with as a slave country), but were writing well and persistently, seemed to him real and worth enlarging. Perhaps, at that time he became aware that what he had allowed to creep into *Opinion* a decade ago by whimsically responding to the impulsive action of a young girl, had indeed grown to be a force worth channelling. Perhaps he even felt that there was a lot of talent knocking about without any steady, respectably established avenue of expression. The big journals had very little place for literature, the heroic 'Little Magazines', too obscure and coterie-catering. However it was, he did launch the 'little brother'. It had only four numbers, and the extremely high quality of the work that appeared in them proved at least his last point. It saddens me more than I cared to admit at that time, that neither the readers' response, nor the contributors', made the venture worth losing the amount of money that

the Editor would have had to lose had he insisted on continuing it. To close it down after only a year was a bitter decision to him and to all who were involved in its production. Had some means been found to prolong its life, it would have been a proud little magazine, proclaiming to the world the viability of Indian writing in English; and its capacity to compete on equal terms not only with any other Indian literature, but with English writing anywhere else in the world. Perhaps it was too optimistic a gesture, perhaps our time is yet to come. To me, the bitterest aspect of it was that Mr G had once again proved to have been too idealistic. He was not impractical enough to have expected the *OLQ* to have been an instant success, to have his office flooded with contributions and subscriptions; but he did expect a readership at least comparable to *Opinion*'s. He had never had any trouble filling the 32 pages of *Opinion* every month, he did not anticipate the struggle in trying to fill the 64 of the *Quarterly*. He had captured and held the readers of *Opinion* without any advertisement, right from the beginning, the *Quarterly* should have at least one-fourth as many in its first year. Alas, he was wrong. The *Quarterly*, after almost pathetic hawking to individuals and libraries, crept up to three hundred or so paying subscribers, and its editorial assistants got insomnia visualizing blank pages unfilled on the crucial date, for which they would have to drum up matter out of a dried-up and desperate imagination. The death of the *Quarterly* perhaps proved to Mr G that he was right after all, in regarding the antics of the Indian writer in English as a dilettante sideline of teachers, advertisers, policemen and housewives; that his initial attitude of whimsical acceptance and amused affection was the right response to these frenzied protestations of outraged emotions. He has returned to his first love, it is to be hoped a wiser man, but not too much sadder. It was an experience all of his friends felt he should rather have been without.

In my experience, his most exasperating trait as an Editor was his stubbornness. Of course, every editor is autocratic to a degree and, I feel, is entitled to be, since the journal he edits is essentially *him*. However, in the case of the ordinary editor, there are ways of persuading him to reconsider his opinions. There is a large body of his subordinates that can plead with him, or in rare circumstances bully him; there is the bogey

management; there is, in the ultimate analysis, the public. None of these levers was operative in the case of Mr G. Since he had no other helpers or backers or employees, he was immune from the action of the first two, and since he was convinced that he was going to give the public what was good for it, regardless of whether it wanted it or not, he was not prepared to consider the last. Once he had made up his mind on any issue, and I must admit in all fairness that he made up his mind after long and well-informed consideration, it was nearly impossible to sway him. One could argue endlessly without meeting any success. I have not yet seen him change his mind on any fundamental issue. His answers to arguments were always coherent, patient and without anger. The angrier you got, the more patient he became until you were forced to drown your indignation in the glass of rum he always thoughtfully provided in such circumstances. There again, he displayed a dichotomy, often surprising to his older colleagues and friends. The inflexibility on matters of principle that was so much a part of his moral intellectual height became amused resignation when it came to judging and dealing with people he had a genuine affection for. I have seen him, who would never bear fools gladly, put up with infuriatingly trivial people without any seeming impatience or boredom. After one such display, an old friend said, 'He would not have put up with the likes of you in his Assistant Collector days!' In a way this makes me glad, because if he had been as he was then, the recollection of the number of times he has indulgently parried my foolish arguments would have made me ashamed to face him again.

I have also felt sometimes that his intense mistrust and loathing for the dictator arose not only from the misery such people heap upon humankind. One fears in others what one has instinctively felt to be one's own weakness. He is surely a man introspective and honest enough to have faced himself at three o'clock in the morning and have found out the simmerings of exasperated impatience with the slow stupidity of humankind that are the beginning of dictators. The tempting thought 'If only I could catch hold of them and make them see the light!' must have come to him time and again, only to be thrust aside by the force of intellectual convictions. But at three o'clock in the morning intellectual convictions make a poor safeguard to

the imagination of a man autocratic by nature, used early to the exercise of individual power and charisma and convinced that he is right. Of such stuff are made great rulers and messiahs. It says much for the rigidly disciplined intellect of the man that he became neither. He did, in fact, become a great Editor, the sort of Editor that stories will be told about. Readers of *Opinion* will long remember his idiosyncrasies, his cantankerous pet peeves, his enchantingly egotistic Tales, his clear, pointed and yet elegant style, in effect, his *editorship*. Had he headed one of the great and influential journals of the world, he would have become a legend. Editing *Opinion*, he has become much more : a fountainhead from which his readers derive courage, humility, patience in adversity and inspiration. With all my heart, I return to the Editor the compliments and, above all, thanks with which he commenced our acquaintance so long ago.

The Administrator as Writer

A. G. NOORANI

Mr A. D. Gorwala is first and foremost an administrator—a doer —and next a writer. This is not to deny his skill in the art of writing but rather to emphasize that his strength as one of the country's foremost publicists derives considerably from his varied experience as an administrator, and an outstandingly able and upright one at that. He has spent nearly a quarter-century in the civil service and has devoted as long a period, by now, to writing. Yet in the public mind the two records blend into one, as it were. The writing rings true because the preceptor himself practised the principles of good, clean public administration that he proclaims week after week in his inimitable style in *Opinion*.

In the course of a study on Ministers' misconduct, this writer consulted many a report on public administration and on probity in public life. None was more perceptive or better written than the *Report on Public Administration* which Mr Gorwala prepared for the Planning Commission in 1951.

He warned then that

> Parliamentary government is in its infancy in the country. Accordingly, this is the proper time to lay down and observe conventions, so that with the passage of years they may consolidate into traditions which those who come hereafter will accept instinctively knowing that, based as they are on the wisdom of their fathers, they will serve their turn well.

Recalling the Sanskrit proverb, 'As the King, so the people', he stressed that it was the conduct of those at the top which shaped the country's development. By 1951 the situation in this regard had deteriorated enough for Mr Gorwala to record :

> During the past few years there have been various instances in which grave allegations of a specific nature have been made by